

FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month



(Developed by Zygouris-Coe V., & Glass C., 2004)

Rationale:

Students need strategies to independently acquire new words. Teaching students to use word parts to figure out the meanings of words in text can be beneficial to their vocabulary development. "Knowing some common prefixes and suffixes (affixes), base words, and root words can help students learn the meanings of many new words" (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Morphemic analysis uses roots and affixes to derive meaning from an unknown word. Researchers suggest that teachers explicitly teach affixes and suffixes, along with common prefixes and derivational suffixes (Baumann & Kame'enui, 2004). The *Word Builder* strategy is a simple way to teach and build students' morphemic analysis and vocabulary knowledge and skills.

The basic parts of a word are:

- Root or base word
- Prefix
- Suffix

A **root** or base refers to the essential part of the word and is where the word derives its meaning.

A **prefix** can be considered a syllable that is attached to the front of a word that can alter or change the meaning of the root word.

A **suffix** can be considered a letter or letters added to the end of a word that can change its tense and/or meaning of the root word.

How to Use the Strategy:

Not all children come to us with the same experiences or vocabulary knowledge. Although a great deal of vocabulary is learned indirectly, some vocabulary should be taught directly. This can be done through specific vocabulary instruction (teaching specific words, engagement with words, and repeated exposure to words in many contexts) and word learning strategies (using dictionaries and other reference aids, using word parts, and using context clues). Recent research shows that we can narrow the gap through explicit, *robust* vocabulary instruction.

A *robust* approach to vocabulary instruction involves directly explaining the meanings of words along with thought-provoking, playful and interactive follow-up. According to Beck, McKewon, & Kucan (2002), words are learned best *when learned in context with thought-provoking and interactive follow-up in the classroom*. Beck, McKewon, & Kucan (2002) identified the following three tiers of words for vocabulary instruction.

- Tier I (high frequency words) – includes high frequency, basic sight words that rarely require instruction in school — for example, the, play, and come.
- **Tier II (rich words)** – includes high frequency words for mature language users. Instruction in these words can add to a student's general ability — for example, coincidence, disposition, and industrious. This includes words students will encounter through listening or reading experiences that occur in a wide variety of situations and texts. This is where teachers should focus their vocabulary instruction.
- Tier III (low-frequency words) – includes words whose frequency of use is normally quite low and limited to specific domains.

Here is a way to use the *Word Builder* strategy in a way that will help support robust vocabulary instruction (especially as it relates to Tier II words): Take a root word and see how many other words can be made by adding suffixes and prefixes— model explicitly and provide practice and support; show students how they can problem-solve with words using this strategy. An example might be done with the word "salty." You can add different suffixes and prefixes and change the word into *unsalty*, *ultrasalty*, and *saltless*. Remember to take time to discuss the meaning with your students.

Beck, I. L., McKewon, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.



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